DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 035 055 CG 004 886

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TITLE The Unmalias on Campus.
PUB DATE Oct 69
NOTE 17p.; Paper presented at the National Council on Family Relations Convention, Washington, D.C., October 24--26, 1969

EDRS PRICE EDRS Price MF-$0.25 HC-$0.95
DESCRIPTORS Behavior, *Changing Attitudes, College Students, Institutional Role, *Marital Status, *Marriage, Relationship, Student Alienation, Student Attitudes, *Values

ABSTRACT

This paper is an attempt to discuss in sociological perspective the natural history of the developing ideology that allows and permits unmarried liaisons. Six topics are discussed. First, institutional disruption or dissatisfaction with the institution of marriage in whole or part seems quite prevalent among college students. Secondly, since this is a time of rapid change during which old ways are being reevaluated, alienation from established ways, i.e. marriage, is increasing. Next, given a certain amount of institutional looseness and a sense of alienation, there are new opportunities for deviance, such as living in a non-marital arrangement. Further, universities may, today, in some ways be creating a radical intelligentsia which focuses on social forms not seriously considered previously as within the realm of possibility. Communes and communal living may be the result. Group support, by teachers, peers and parents also has a definite influence on unmarried liaisons. Finally, many themes, values and sentiments contribute to the adaption of unmarried liaisons, including individualism, resourcefulness, and self reliance. (KJ)

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THE UNMALIAS* ON CAMPUS**

The tendency for campus youth to practice varied forms of trial marriage has caught the fancy of the mass media and some concerned social scientists and practitioners.[1] Although the habit of living together is certainly not new, the numbers currently involved appear to be much increased and possibly the meanings today are altered. This paper is an attempt to discuss in sociological perspective the natural history of the developing ideology that allows and permits Unmalias behavior. The six topics, in order of their historical flow to be discussed are: disruption in the conventional institutions and sources of social control, alienation from traditional ways of behaving, opening of new opportunity structures to indulge in deviance,*** the development of new social forms,

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* Contraction of "Unmarried Liaisons" arrived at out of desperation and need for a shorthand word to describe this emergent phenomenon.

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[1]CBS Playhouse, Feb. 25, 1969, "The Experiment," Arno Karlen, "The Unmarried Marrieds on Campus," New York Times Magazine, Jan. 26, 1969, pp.29-30

*** It should be noted that the author's use of the term "deviance" to describe Unmalias behavior does not convey a value-judgement, but rather departure from established norms governing sex behavior.

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reference group support for the new behavior, and finally, emerging ideologies to solidify the social forms.

Institutional Disruption

The problem of causes and correlates of social change occupy a significant place in contemporary sociological literature. In reviewing most of the literature on family sociology, one is led to the conclusion that on the whole, stable family forms are only slowly changing, and that those who deviate from the norm are only a small and unimportant minority. The question of institutional disruption is a very thorny empirical problem because bits of data must be drawn together and interpreted - from a necessarily incomplete picture of the facts. Depending on the source of "facts" and the interpretation one wishes to make, different conclusions may be drawn about the immediate future of the family as an institution. Aside from the visible evidence which is incomplete, there is to be considered a less visible underground level of deviant activity. Thus, the intensity, meaning, and level of activity associated with this behavior is essentially an unknown quantity. Its importance can be denied, but the evidence for its impact can be gleaned from diverse sources.

One source of support for understanding the trend in institutional disruption might be seen in the recent CBS report on the generations in which data from a national sample of youth were discussed and reviewed.[2] This report suggests that "There is no reliable way to state that the rebellious minorities are larger in size than they have ever been in the past. But they are large, and they are concentrated in the "youth leadership" communities - the college campuses - where indeed on some issues they actually become majorities."[3] The report goes on to say that in the sections of the survey dealing with political and institutional values by which adult America lives (or presumes to do so), there is revealed a "deep-seated sense of disaffection on the part of the young with these values and institutions."[4] Large minorities and on campuses sometimes majorities of youth are "sharply critical of our economic and political systems and the "Establishment" and authorities who run them."[5] As an example of this type of response, 24 percent of the youth

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[2]Daniel Yankelovich, "Generations Apart," television special presented on CBS, May 20, 27 and June 3, 1969.

[3,4,5]Generations Apart, a research report in which the CBS survey findings are published., CBS, 1969, pp.3-4.

agreed with a statement regarding the obsolescence of the present institution of marriage.[6] This single item is difficult to interpret since no one knows how large a minority would be needed to involve itself in alternatives to marriage to be a threat to society. Of course there are other considerations, and no one knows how many who agree with this type of statement would in reality follow up his values with action in terms of violation of institutional norms. This is, I would suggest, a large and growing minority that expresses dissatisfaction with the status quo. In the same report, 51 percent of college youth "strongly agreed" with the statement that "Sexual behavior should be bound by mutual feelings, not by formal ties." When those who "partially agree" are added to this, college youth totalled 84 percent.[7] This is indeed an indicator of great importance when we view on the one hand the formal codes governing sexual relations and on the other the great number of youth who are in colleges and tend to become the forefront of social change.

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[6] Ibid., p.18

[7] Ibid., p.23

Alienation

An item on alienation was also suggestive of the problems faced by youth. In response to the question, "The individual in today's society is isolated and cut off from meaningful relationships with others," 59 percent of the college youth sample either strongly or partially agreed. A slightly smaller portion of the total youth responded the same (56 percent).[8] Whether this reflects a folk-norm of college life (that is to talk about one's alienation experiences) or whether it is a real phenomenon, the fact that this sample responds so heavily in this direction gives us cause to wonder about the failure of meaning and belonging, tasks usually associated with our major institutions.

Another recent study by the author showed college youth much more alienated than an older sample they were compared with, especially on certain items such as social isolation and work alienation.[9] Such conditions are interpreted by some sociologists of the mass society variety to

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[8] Ibid., p.24.

[9] Robert N. Whitehurst and Marene M. Olson, "Alienation and The Generations: A Comparative Study of Perceptions and Attitudes," paper read at the Ohio Valley Sociological Society, May 1, 1969, Indianapolis, Indiana.

mean that radicalization of minorities can occur much more easily now than under conditions of institutional stability. Another indicator of alienation from standard values is seen in one of the few replicative studies done over a ten year period on a college population. Christensen has found in a repeat study of college attitudes toward premarital sex a trend toward liberalization.[10] Changes most dramatically are shown in the female attitudes in this time period (from 1958 to 1968). In 1958, Christensen's data showed in his midwest sample that 20 percent of the females said they had actually experienced premarital sex, whereas in 1968, 34 percent made this claim. At the same time, the proportion claiming that premarital sex "Never should be approved under any circumstance" dropped from 49 percent in 1958 to 27 percent in 1968 (data for females). All the findings seem to indicate a general loosening of attitudes and probably behavior making probable the seeking of other kinds of relationships considered before as seriously deviant.

One more indicator of increasing looseness of the institutional hold marriage as an institution maintains

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[10]Harold T. Christensen, preliminary data from doctoral thesis in progress, Christena Ferguson, Purdue University. Data presented at the Indiana Council on Family Relations, Feb. 18, 1969. Purdue University.

over the young can be seen in data from an unpublished study involving a comparison of marriage attitudes and alienation.[11] In a college sample polled in the summer of 1969, 39 percent said they believed that it is possible to be in love with more than one person at a time while 72 percent agreed with a statement suggesting that "good marriage adjustment is either difficult or impossible because of current social conditions." These bits of information point up again that we are living in a period of rapid change in which old ways are being re-evaluated and the result is often levels of alienation from established ways.

New opportunity structures:

Given a certain amount of institutional looseness and a sense of alienation, we must account for new opportunities for deviance in order to anticipate an increase in the behavior. Opportunity to live in a non-marital living arrangement can be seen as arising basically out of two facets of social change: breakdown of old sources of social control

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[11]Robert N. Whitehurst - preliminary data from a forthcoming paper titled, "Alienation and the Futures of Marriage," Unpublished.

in the community, family and in the religious institutions and a vastly changed economic base affecting youth in qualitatively new ways. These two factors, coupled with high rates of mobility away from home and families of orientation in late adolescence make for an increased probability of involvement with a socially permissive milieu. No previous generation has been placed so much on its own with such adequate financial support as has the current college population. It should be noted that most of the youth who tend to indulge in Unmalias behavior appear to be serious in their search for meaning. Adult projections often see it simply as sexual; this idea is more of an adult fantasy than youthful reality as the norms governing their behavior often stress the relationship aspect of the pairing rather than the hedonistic elements. Search for self and search for meaning are validated by this type of paired relationship according to the participants.

Thus, opportunity is made possible by a loose web of social control and supported by the economic forces at work which so differentially affect our affluent youth as compared to previous generations.

New Social Forms:

College is a period in the lives of older adolescents in which old values are examined, new ideas tried out in the relatively free arena of academic give and take. Historically, social change that has occurred through academic institutions has involved working with and altering the institutions prevailing. Some of the major social movements have been created out of the stuff of persecuted minorities, not in colleges. Given the social context described above, however, this may now be in process of change - universities may in some ways be creating a radical intelligentsia which focuses on social forms not seriously considered before as within the realm of possibility. A renewed interest in variant social forms of community has been given stimulus by recent changes. Within the past few years professional work in sociology has included some comment on these problems of community.[12] The recent habit of college youth to attempt to develop communes has also attracted much attention. Since the current crop of American

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[12]As an example of the range of sociological interest, two sources might be cited: Robert A. Nisbet, The Quest for Community, New York, Oxford, 1953 and; Carolyn Symonds, Sexual Mate-Swapping: Violation of Norms and Reconciliation of Guilt - a study of ideology of swinging. The Symonds paper is an outgrowth of her MA thesis studying the differences in ideologically or communally oriented swingers and recreational swingers, Department of Sociology, Univ. of Calif., Riverside,1968.

youth have been reared in homes of a reasonably privatized variety (and probably with more privacy given to the individual family member than ever before in history - especially since World War II), it seems a plausible hypothesis to suggest that most youth will have great difficulty living in communes because of their early socialization and individualistic tendencies. The same factor that makes communal living difficult may make the paired relationships in Unmalias behavior seem all the more desirable and likely as an outcome. Thus, I see contemporary youth in a transitional stage - freed essentially from the old mores about sex, but unprepared to do anything but try a slightly deviant form of interaction - the Unmalias adaptation. This does not mean that there will not be a continued trend toward communal development, for this is likely - but it will take a still-different generation to make these work as it appears now. The essential point to note here is that there is no shortage of experiments and possibilities under examination and in various stages of exploration. This in itself as a social fact tends to loosen up further exploration, experimentation, and discussion about real life adaptations in a society youth feel no longer provides vital answers to their lives in terms they can accept. The functionality of this type of new adaptation

has only been marginally discussed by sociologists; one such avenue can lead to an assessment of the meaning of the emerging values in terms of economic institutions in a society characterized by surplus and cybernetically controlled production. In other words, the transitional organizations under discussion today may be functional for some future poorly understood at the moment - but that is indeed another problem.

Group support

No new social form such as Unmalias can survive without normative and comparative reference group support. What are the sources of these? Normative rearrangement was long ago noted by Newcomb in his Bennington college study.[13] As students, we are taught to almost revere the idea of higher education. Although the old image is rapidly changing and giving way to a more questioning and doubting ethos, a still-large number of students can be categorized as "serious." This means in effect that college is a kind of serious business replete with meanings not always conveyed to professors by

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[13]Theodore M. Newcomb, "Attitude Development as a Function of Reference Groups," in Eleanor E. Maccoby, Newcomb, and E.L. Hartley, Readings in Social Psychology, 3rd ed. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1958, pp.265-275.

their students who do listen intently and assimilate new-found bits of information. As a group, teachers are quite often taken more seriously than we understand and we do become positive integers in reference terms for youth. If we look at the themes in sociology as an example, we find much that can be potentially disruptive to old ways of seeing the world and in responding to it.[14]

Basically, there are three potential sources of group support for the deviant behavior as reflected in the Unmalia adaptation: Teachers, especially college teachers in disciplines involving the social sciences and humanities; peers - and this may be the most single significant source of support for Unmalia behavior in terms of positive referents; finally, other adults, including parents (who generally serve as a positive model for some aspects of behavior, but increasingly less frequently as models for what a marriage or male-female relationship should be). The level of rejection of the conventional model for marriage as related to parents is highly variable as would be expected, but it is probably safe to say that unconventional youth see their

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[14]Peter Berger, Invitation to Sociology, Anchor-Doubleday, New York: 1963, p.52.

parents from a tolerant and bemused (almost smug) sense of their own convictions that a relationship could and ought to do more and be better. The bogey of the "Establishment" lumps in all of the remaining institutions and their representatives that form a kind of nucleus to act as a negative reference group (one I disidentify with or that I wish to be unlike). This does not mean that any of the above-named groups (teachers, peers, or establishment - others) consciously try to structure the Unmalia adaptation into or out of the lives of youth; it simply means that there is now an enhanced probability more frequently occurring because of the way these forces act on college youth of today.

Alterations to ideology

When we examine some of the dominant themes, values, and sentiments, the basic stuff of ideologies, we find a number of good American values that can be seen as contributory to the Unmalias adaptation. Individualism, resourcefulness and self-reliance are all involved in making the decision to defy the conventional authority in this type of relationship. Democracy as a value can be seen to foster the participation of youth in Unmalias behavior since they

feel conventional marriage involves the double-standard and discrimination. Freedom and truth-seeking can also play a role in this, and the test of the truth of an institution may to many youth lie in demonstrating its ineffectiveness in meeting human needs as they practice the new way.

Seeking of humanitarian goals may also be involved as the institution of marriage is sometimes seen as stultifying rather than building of personalities and character to the fullest. Rationality, involving an examination of the means in relation to the ends sought (often involving science) is also involved in the process of a developing ideology of acceptance of Unmalias behavior. It is a well-developed American practice to take a pragmatic approach to problems, to refuse to take things on blind faith or tradition. Youth who want to know for themselves (and are encouraged to use this approach in other spheres) are likely to transfer this learning - even though society at large does not like this kind of spill-over effect. American norms and values are organized to support a straightforward and honest approach to problem-solving. We must recognize that no human society has so elongated the period between puberty and preferred marriage age while at the same time unloading via the mass media on youth an unprecedented amount of sexual stimuli -

all the while holding the line (formally at least) for chastity before marriage. It seems a forthright and honest approach to a matter of human need, not only sexually but socially to the participants, already alienated and suffering in some degree from the rigors of mass life. A related theme involves a quite old and respectable norm of existentially grappling with one's problems, making decisions, living and learning from them and not belaboring errors. We are told to learn by involvement, doing, participating, and living. Possibly no other single American theme creates a positive sense of ideological support for Unmalias behavior.

Summary and conclusions

Much evidence points to a developing set of circumstances supportive of the increased tendency of youth to live together in what has been described as Unmalias relationships. Although no apparent majority of youth have experienced or possibly anticipate the idea of practicing Unmalias, an ever larger and poorly understood minority seem to be indulging. The more conventional society seems to have at least partly gone beyond simple castigation because of the illicit sexual activity (this social fact may be attributed to hippies, since they most clearly got us used to the idea that possibly all sex outside marriage may not be as bad, sinful, etc. as we

seemed to believe before). Most parents still are shocked, especially when daughters are involved, but adjust they usually do. It is less rare for parents now to "understand" and possibly be helpful when these relationships occur, but it is still a safe bet that when parents arrive on the scene, that the "stage" is reset for them so they do not find out the truth (another existential problem for the truth-seekers!).

I have discussed briefly some of the factors attributing to the potential increase in Unmalias adaptations. In part, there are historic precedents that set the stage for Unmalias as well as common American values involved, so the behavior is not really so strange when we look at the history of its generation and the social context today which makes it so easy. In another paper, I have dealt with the problem of the relationships involved in more detail.[15] There are no doubt some repercussions and implications for the future that can now be seen only in dim outline. The further decline in the double standard seems

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[15]Robert N. Whitehurst, "The Double-Standard and Male Dominance in Non-Marital Living Arrangements: A Preliminary Statement," paper presented at the American Orthopsychiatric Association Meeting, New York, March 29, 1969.

inevitable. The fairly new trend of openness in male-female relationships totally seems likely to be affected. A possible outcome may be the future institutionalization of trial marriage of some sort - or of several sorts if the primitive trends in organizing a truly pluralistic society continue.

In meetings such as these (National Council on Family Relations 1969), a definite readiness to discuss and listen to those with ideas which depart from the ordinary and conventional is an encouraging sign that we can broaden the horizons of understanding further than in our constricted past. Out of such understanding, at least in embryonic form, can come the possibility of bringing what is now underground to the surface so it can be examined in a less furtive context of meaning for a doubtful future. More thorough research and testing, with longitudinal studies give promise of establishing some baselines of meaning and significance for the most personal of relationships, man and woman. This is but the beginning of understanding of what may be a most important underground social movement which needs insight.